



LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Celebrating 25 Years of Advocacy & Achievement

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Sandra Rudnick
Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW
Martha Trevino Powell
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **February 1, 2010**, in Room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim accounting or transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Patricia Curry	Steven M. Olivas, Esq.
Carol O. Biondi	Stacey Savelle
Susan F. Friedman	Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW
Helen A. Kleinberg	Martha Trevino Powell
Dr. La-Doris McClaney	Dr. Harriette F. Williams

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Ann Franzen	Sandra Rudnick
Rev. Cecil L. Murray	Maria Rochart

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Curry at 10:04 a.m.

II. INTRODUCTIONS

Self introductions were made.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- **February 1, 2010**

Action Taken:

On motion of Commissioner McClaney, seconded by Commissioner Kleinberg, the agenda for February 1, 2010, was unanimously approved.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- **October 19, 2009**
- **January 11, 2010**

Chair Curry deferred the minutes for October 19, 2009 and January 11, 2010 to the February 22, 2010 meeting.

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V. CHAIR'S REPORT

No report was presented.

VI. PRESENTATION AND ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

- **Update on DCFS Visitation Work Plan – Helen A. Kleinberg
Harvey Kawasaki, DCFS
Alma Golla, DCFS
Members of the External Stakeholders
on Visitation**

Commissioner Kleinberg welcomed guest speakers and reported that visitation is the most important component to reunification, and one of the key goals for the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS). The Visitation Work Plan took six years to develop, and was accomplished through the efforts of the Reunification, DCFS Visitation, and the Juvenile Court Visitation Committees as well as DCFS Deputy Directors.

Harvey Kawasaki, DCFS Division Chief, reported the following:

- The Visitation Work Plan was approved by the Executive Team on December 14, 2009.
- The new Visitation guidelines required a paradigm shift, from a visitation framework of monitoring, to one of coaching and supervised visits that foster more natural contacts between parents and children.
- Implementation and liberalization of visits is a step-down/five-tier process.
- Training and guidance given to caregivers, relative caregivers, or guardians, has a “coaching and training” perspective. It is not restricted to child supervision, and includes a training component that focuses on health and education and birth parents’ well-being.

Michelle Brienze, CSA II, Training Section, added that “Intentional Visitation” training began in March 2009, and stressed the importance of engaging the parent or relatives to improve their parenting, rather than monitoring them. Feedback from the social workers trained has been highly positive; many commented that it has refreshed their perspective to social work.

Jodi Kurata, ACHSA for FFA-Group Homes, thanked DCFS for including the Association of Community Human Services Agencies (ACHSA) in discussions concerning *Intentional Visitation*, highlighted the following concerns:

- In the coaching model, not every caregiver will become a visitation coach. From the foster parents’ perspective; DCFS’ expectation that foster parents consider adoption and universally coach is unrealistic.

- Coaching must be completed by someone who is professionally qualified to do so. A foster parent isn't necessarily qualified to be a Visitation Coach.
- If the family has a history of substance abuse or mental health issues it is unclear how families will be fairly assessed, and whether visitation coaching is feasible.
- The Visitation Plan has unrealistic expectations due to resource limitations. The Coaching Plan has been effective at Visitation Centers due to the resources from the community, volunteers and DCFS. Outside of these centers, the model would be difficult to execute.
- Providers have pointed out that information sharing relative to case planning, case management goals, and critical information (i.e. court orders regarding visitation and contact information between birth parents and children) is not consistently shared by the CSW.
- The FFA/Group Home must be involved in the visitation, and it is important for CSWs and FFA workers to collaborate on the Visitation process together.

Mr. Kawasaki will meet with ACHSA next week to discuss feedback on the DCFS paradigm shift.

Monica Kelly, Parents in Partnership (PIP), reported that being a participant in the Visitation Plan has been a great help in providing the parent's point of view. DCFS allows PIP parents on the front-end to answer questions from mothers with detained children. Conducting visitations at non-Department locations is a breakthrough in the process, and will have a major impact on reunification.

Brenda Robinson, CCLA, reported the following:

- The Courts were instrumental in the realization of liberalized visits.
- It is important that children have contact with their parents immediately following detention.
- Visitation reports should be more comprehensive, and the quality of visits reported more often.
- Children should be located closer to their parents to increase Visitation; CSWs should notify the court of location proximity between child and parent.
- It has yet to be determined how the judicial officers will be trained.

William Bedrossian, DCFS, reported that Visitations have been staged outside of DCFS offices because Visitation rooms are extremely small and may be uncomfortable. In sexual abuse or domestic violence cases, a CSW will be present to ensure the visit remains without episode, and public environments (i.e., public parks or restaurants) are not helpful because they are too distracting for a one-on-one dialogue between family members. DCFS has determined that the best environments for Visitations are churches and other faith-based facilities.

Mary Hammer, South Bay Center for Counseling, credited DCFS SPA 8 for taking the lead in coach recruitment, through several churches and the general community. Potential candidates were screened, provided with a coaching orientation, a one-day training that included relationship issues, listening without being judgmental, and other related matters. Coaches must be able to make a long-term commitment to the project and occasionally consult with parents after reunification.

Pastor Mike Ellingson, Parkcrest Christian Church, reported that church involvement is a great opportunity to aid the community. To accommodate the Visitation Plan, the church extensively remodeled one of its classrooms to simulate a living room with couches and chairs. The South Bay Center for Counseling assisted in funding the room remodel. To date, there are twenty volunteer trained coaches and monitors, whose valuable assistance has resulted in six reunifications.

Harvey Kawasaki, DCFS, clarified several points made in the Draft Visitation Work Plan:

- Judge Ziegler recommended that additional Human Services Aides be hired to assist the Visitation process; however a Human Services Aid should not be responsible for all the work involved.
- The Visitation Center models established in SPAs 7 and 8 through the Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project (PIDP) will be used as models to establish centers in all other SPAs.
- The budget to start a Visitation Center is approximately \$20,000; and \$10,000 a year thereafter, to maintain a Center.
- Sixteen Visitation Centers are planned. A budget of \$400,000 out of \$2.7 million would go to the Visitation Centers.

Commission Sorkin expressed the following:

- The manner in which the CSWs communicate with the court needs improvement; both, negative and positive events relating to parents' visitation with children should be equally reported to the court.
- To increase visitation, children need to be placed geographically within close proximity to the parents.
- The Visitation Work Plan should explore the probability of having visitations take place at the parents' home.
- When the Visitation Work Plan indicates *liberalization*, this should occur rather than waiting for the next court date.

Trish Ploehn, DCFS, added that she has been meeting with the Funders' Forum, a funding entity who have expressed interest in supporting a Visitation Center, and are welcoming application from Community Based Centers, particularly from churches.

Action Taken:

Verbal reports by Harvey Kawasaki, Michelle Brienze and William Bedrossian, DCFS, Mary Hammer, South Bay Center for Counseling, Pastor Mike Ellingson, Parkcrest Christian Church, Brenda Robinson, CCLA, and Monica Kelly, PIP, were received and filed. The DCFS Draft Visitation Work Plan was received and filed ([copies on file](#)). Chair Curry advised that the Relative Caregiver, Faith Based and Visitation Committees will meet to discuss the details in the DCFS Draft Visitation Work Plan.

VII. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Trish Ploehn, DCFS, gave the following report:

- The budget for FY 2010 is set for LA County at \$7 million. The budget is tightened to hiring, services and supplies; there will be intense scrutiny on purchases made by order of the CEO's office. Partnering with both public and private agencies is the only way DCFS can overcome financial obstacles this year.
- DCFS deputies will return to the next meeting to report on a new ER study, which has just been completed. It is a one-year study with 600 referrals; 200 interviews were completed and some outstanding recommendations were made.
- Dr. Charles Sophy, Medical Director, will begin a book tour in support of his new book, "Side By Side: The Revolutionary Mother-Daughter Program for Conflict-Free Communication."

Action Taken:

Director Ploehn's verbal report was received and filed.

VIII. COMMITTEE/LIAISON REPORTS

- **Childhood Wellness – Adelina Sorkin**
 - **Update on the Healthy Lifestyle Trainings for Relative Care Givers**

Commissioner Sorkin reported the following:

1. The first Healthy Lifestyle Training for Relative Caregivers was given at St. Andrew's Catholic Church in Pasadena on December 10, 2009. Commissioner Williams was in attendance, in addition to 16 parents and 31 children. The event was a success, and educational for everyone; several parents were introduced to vegetables they've never enjoyed before.
2. First 5 just released a newsletter on healthy lifestyles entitled, "Waging War on Childhood Obesity."
3. The next Healthy Lifestyles Training is scheduled for Thursday, February 25, 2010, at Calvary Baptist Church, to be followed by Van Nuys Seventh-Day Adventist Church on March 18; and the Trinity Baptist Church in April.

4. The trainings have inspired the Department of Public Health to hold their own independent trainings, the most recent one held in Long Beach.

Action Taken:

Commissioner Sorkin's verbal report was received and filed.

- **Motion to Place a "Save The Date" flyer publicizing the Healthy Lifestyle Trainings on the Commission for Children and Families' web page**

Action Taken:

On motion of Commissioner Sorkin, seconded by Commissioner Biondi, the aforementioned motion was unanimously approved ([copy of flyer on file](#)).

IX. MOTION TO APPROVE A LETTER TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS RECOMMENDING THE GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN

Chair Curry reported on a draft letter ([copy on file](#)) prepared by the Commission to the Board of Supervisors (Board) recommending the addition of a group home Ombudsman for probation camps and juvenile halls with oversight provided by the Auditor-Controller. This concept has been discussed with the Auditor-Controller staff, and the Commission has advocated for this change in the past. The Probation Commission President recommended that the letter be held until the new Probation Department Director takes office. The letter also requested that the Probation Ombudsman telephone line, which had been reported out of order, be repaired.

Vice Chair Friedman made a suggestion to amend the letter as follows:

Paragraph 1: We are writing ~~to you recommending~~ **to recommend** that the Group Home Ombudsman in the Los Angeles County Auditor-Controllers Office now extend ~~their~~ **its** services to youth in the probation camps and juvenile halls.

Paragraph 3: **It is more problematic for youth when they find that they have no outlet to express their problems.** Recently, the Commission became aware the phone number for the Probation Ombudsman was out of service. While Probation

Chair Curry made a suggestion to add the following language, as paragraph two of the letter:

"The Commission requests that Auditor-Controller's Office extend its services and expertise to youth in probation camps and juvenile halls by reviewing the current Ombudsman function and making recommendations for a more independent approach. In their review, the Auditor Controller's Office should consider whether the function should be moved to the Auditor-Controller's Office or that some other oversight process take place."

Commissioner Biondi made a motion to approve the letter as amended by Vice Chair Friedman and Chair Curry.

Action Taken:

Motion failed for lack of second.

Vice Chair Curry made a motion to accept the letter in concept, and direct the Chair to finalize and send the letter to the Board regarding the telephone line and an independent Ombudsman.

Action Taken:

Motion failed for lack of second.

Don Chadwick, representing the Auditor-Controller, confirmed receiving a copy of the draft letter. He added that representatives from the Auditor-Controller's Office are not opposed to the concept of bringing in an independent and unbiased entity to assume the functions of the Probation Ombudsman under the oversight of the Auditor-Controller's Office. However, he suggested that the letter be revised to recommend to the Board that the Auditor-Controller conduct a review of the issues and return to the Board with recommendations on potential oversight and funding for this entity.

Commissioner Trevino Powell made a motion to meet with Auditor-Controller to obtain their input in finalizing the letter regarding the Ombudsman position. Commissioner Sorkin seconded the motion.

Action Taken:

Motion failed due to lack of votes.

Commissioner Biondi made motion to immediately notify the Board of the inoperable telephone line as well as the importance of an independent Ombudsman. Commissioner Friedman seconded the motion.

Commissioner Olivas submitted an amendment to Commissioner Biondi's motion to send a letter regarding the inoperable telephone line but revisit the issue of the independent Ombudsman on February 22, 2010. Commissioner Biondi accepted Commissioner Olivas' amendment.

Action Taken:

On motion of Commissioner Biondi, seconded by Commissioner Olivas, unanimously carried, the Commission approved the following:

- 1) Send a memo to the Chief Probation Officer and Probation Commission requesting immediate attention to the inoperable telephone line.

- 2) Revisit the issue regarding the independent Ombudsman, and discuss a draft letter at the meeting of February 22, 2010.

X. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was none.

XI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Curry at 12:07 p.m.